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Rubaiyat  
of  
Omar Khayyam



*Wake! For the Sun behind you Eastern height  
Has chased the Session of the Stars from Night;  
And, to the field of Heav'n ascending, strikes  
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light.*

# THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

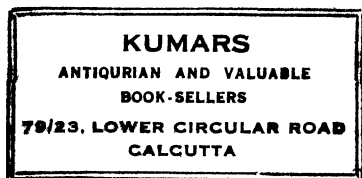
EDWARD FITZGERALD

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# **Omar Khayyam**

**THE ASTRONOMER-POET  
OF PERSIA**

*(PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.)*



# OMAR KHAYYAM

## THE ASTRONOMER-POET OF PERSIA

OMAR KHAYYAM was born at Naishá-púr in Khorassán in the latter half of our Eleventh, and died within the First Quarter of our Twelfth, Century. The slender Story of his Life is curiously twined about that of two other very considerable Figures in their Time and Country : one of them, Hasan al Sabbáh, whose very Name has lengthen'd down to us as a terrible Synonym for Murder : and the other (who tells the Story of all Three) Nizamul-Mulk, Vizyr to Alp the Lion and Malik Shah, Son and Grandson of Toghrul Beg the Tartar, who had wrested Persia from the feeble Successor of Mahmúd the Great, and founded that Seljukian Dynasty which finally roused Europe into the Crusades. This Nizám-ul-Mulk, in his Wasyat—or Testament—which he wrote and left as a Memorial for future Statesmen—relates the following, as quoted in the *Calcutta Review*, No. 59, from Mirkhond's *History of the Assassins*.

“ ‘ One of the greatest of the wise men of Khorassán was the Imám Mowaffak of Naishápúr, a man highly

this mountain home he obtained that evil celebrity among the Crusaders as the **OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS**, and spread terror through the Mohammedan world; and it is yet disputed whether the word **Assassin**, which they have left in the language of modern Europe as their dark memorial, is derived from the **hashish**, or opiate of hemp-leaves (the Indian **bhang**), with which they maddened themselves to the sullen pitch of oriental desperation, or from the name of the founder of the dynasty, whom we have seen in his quiet collegiate days, at Naishápúr. One of the countless victims of the Assassin's dagger was Nizam-ul-Mulk himself, the old school-boy friend.

“Omar Khayyám also came to the Vizier to claim his share; but not to ask for title or office. “The greatest boon you can confer on me,’ he said, ‘is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the advantages of Science, and pray for your long life and prosperity.’ The Vizier tells us, that, when he found Omar was really sincere in his refusal, he pressed him no further, but granted him a yearly pension of 1200 **mithkáls** of gold, from the treasury of Naishápúr.

“At Naishápúr thus lived and died Omar Khayyám, ‘busied,’ adds the Vizier, ‘in winning knowledge of every kind, and especially in Astronomy, wherein he

attained to a very high pre-eminence. Under the Sultanate of Malik Shah, he came to Merv, and obtained great praise for his proficiency in science, and the Sultan showered favours upon him.'

"When Malik Shah determined to reform the calendar, Omar was one of the eight learned men employed to do it; the result was the *Faláli* era (so called from *Falál-ud-din*, one of the king's names)—'a computation of time,' says Gibbon, 'which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style.' He is also the author of some astronomical tables, entitled *Ziji-Malik-sháhi*," and the French have lately republished and translated an Arabic Treatise of his on Algebra.

These severer Studies, and his Verses, which, though happily fewer than any Persian Poet's, and, though perhaps fugitively composed, the Result of no fugitive Emotion or Thought, are probably the Work and Event of his Life, leaving little else to record. Perhaps he liked a little Farming too, so often as he speaks of the "Edge of the Tilth" on which he loved to rest with his *Diwán* of Verse, his Loaf—and his Wine.

"His *Takhallus* or poetical name (*Khayyám*) signifies a Tent-maker, and he is said to have at one time exercised that trade, perhaps before *Nizám-ul-Mulk*'s generosity raised him to independence. Many

Persian poets similarly derive their names from their occupations; thus we have Attár, 'a druggist,' Assar, 'an oil presser,' etc. (Though all these, like our Smiths, Archers, Millers, Fletchers, etc., may simply retain the Surname of an hereditary calling). 'Omar himself alludes to his name in the following whimsical lines :—

“ ‘ Khayyám, who stitched the tents of science,  
Has fallen in grief's furnace and been suddenly  
burned;  
The shears of Fate have cut the tent ropes of his  
life,  
And the broker of Hope has sold him for  
nothing !’

“ We have only one more anecdote to give of his Life and that relates to the close; related in the anonymous preface which is sometimes prefixed to his poems; it has been printed in the Persian in the appendix to Hyde's *Veterum Persarum Religio*, p. 499; and D'Herbelot alludes to it in his *Bibliothèque*, under *Khiam*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Though *he* attributes the story to a Khiam, “*Philosophe Musulman qui a vecu en Odeur de Saintete dans la Fin du premier et le Commencement du second Siecle*,” no part of which, except the “*Philosophe*,” can apply to *our* Khayyam, who, however, may claim the Story as *his*, on the Score of Rubaiyat 77 and 78 of the present Version. The Rashness of the Words, according to D'Herbelot, consisted in being so opposed to those in the Koran: “No man knows where he shall die.”

“ ‘ It is written in the chronicles of the ancients that this King of the Wise, Omar Khayyám, died at Naishápúr in the year of the Hegira 517 (A.D. 1123); in science he was unrivalled—the very paragon of his age. Khwájah Nizámi of Samarcand, who was one of his pupils, relates the following story: “ I often used to hold conversations with my teacher, Omar Khayyám, in a garden; and one day he said to me. ‘ my tomb shall be in a spot, where the north wind may scatter roses over it.’ I wondered at the words he spake, but I knew that his were no idle words. Years after, when I chanced to revisit Naishápúr, I went to his final resting place, and lo! it was just outside a garden, and trees laden with fruit stretched their boughs over the garden wall, and dropped their flowers upon his tomb, so as the stone was hidden under them,” ’ ’ ’ ”

Thus far—without fear of Trespass—from the *Calcutta Review*.

Though the Sultan “ shower’d Favours upon him,” Omar’s Epicurean Audacity of Thought and Speech caused him to be regarded askance in his own Time and Country. He is said to have been especially hated and dreaded by the Súfis, whose Practice he ridiculed, and whose Faith amounts to little more than his own when stripped of the Mysticism and formal Compliment to Islamism which Omar would not hide



under. Their Poets, including Háfiz, who are (with the exception of Fridúsi) the most considerable in Persia, borrowed largely, indeed, of Omar's material, but turning it to a mystical Use more convenient to Themselves and the People they address'd; a People quite as quick of Doubt as of Belief; quite as keen of the Bodily Senses as of the Intellectual; and delighting in a cloudy Element compounded of all, in which they could float luxuriously between Heaven and Earth, and this World and the Next, on the wings of a poetical expression, that could be recited indifferently whether at the Mosque or the Tavern. Omar was too honest of Heart as well as of Head for this. Having failed (however mistakenly) of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but This, he set about making the most of it; preferring rather to soothe the Soul through the Senses into Acquiescence with Things as they were, than to perplex it with vain mortifications after what they *might be*. It has been seen that his Worldly Desires, however, were not exorbitant; and he very likely takes a humorous pleasure in exaggerating them above that Intellect in whose exercise he must have found great pleasure, though not in a Theological direction. However this may be, his Worldly Pleasures are what they profess to be without any Pretence at divine Allegory; his Wine is the veritable Juice of the Grape: his

Tavern, where it was to be had: his Sáki, the Flesh and Blood that poured it out for him: all which, and where the Roses were in Bloom, was all he profess'd to want of this World or to expect of Paradise.

The Mathematic Faculty, too, which regulated his Fancy, and condensed his Verse to a Quality and Quantity unknown in Persian, perhaps in Oriental, Poetry, help'd by its very virtue perhaps to render him less popular with his countrymen. If the Greeks were Children in Gossip, what does Persian Literature imply but a Second Childishness of Garrulity? And certainly if no ungeometric Greek was to enter Plato's School of Philosophy, no so unchastised a Persian should enter on the Race of Persian Verse, with its "fatal Facility" of running on long after Thought is winded! But Omar was not only the single Mathematician of his Country's Poets; he was also of that older Time and stouter Temper, before the native Soul of Persia was quite broke by a foreign Creed as well as foreign Conquest. Like his great Predecessor Firdúsi, who was as little of a Mystic; who scorned to use even a Word of the very language in which the New Faith came clothed; and who was suspected, not of Omar's Irreligion indeed, but of secretly clinging to the ancient Fire-Religion of Zerdusht, of which so many of the Kings he sang were Worshippers.

For whatever Reason, however, Omar, as before said, has never been popular in his own Country, and therefore has been but charily transmitted abroad. The MSS. of his Poems, mutilated beyond the average Casualties of Oriental Transcription, are so rare in the East as scarce to have reacht Westward at all, in spite of all that Arms and Science have brought us. There is none at the India House, none at the Bibliothèque Impériale of Paris. We know but of one in England; No. 140 of the Ouseley MSS. at the Bodleian, written at Shiraz, A.D 1460. This contains but 158 Rubáiyát. One in the Asiatic Society's Library of Calcutta (of which we have a Copy) contains (and yet incomplete) 516, though swelled to that by all kinds of Repetition and Corruption. So Von Hammer speaks of his Copy as containing about 200, while Dr. Sprenger catalogues the Lucknow MS. at double that Number. The Scribes, too, of the Oxford and Calcutta MSS. seem to do their Work under a sort of Protest; each beginning with a Tetrastich (whether genuine or not) taken out of its alphabetical order; the Oxford with one of Apology; the Calcutta with one of Execration too stupid for Omar's, even had Omar been stupid enough to execrate himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Since this Paper was written" (adds the Reviewer in a note), "we have met with a Copy of a very rare Edition, printed at Calcutta in 1836. This contains 438 Tetrastichs, with an Appendix containing 54 others not found in some MSS."

The Reviewer, who translates the foregoing Particulars of Omar's Life, and some of his Verse into Prose, concludes by comparing him with Lucretius, both in natural Temper and Genius, and as acted upon by the Circumstances in which he lived. Both indeed men of subtle Intellect and high Imagination, instructed in Learning beyond their day, and of Hearts passionate for Truth and Justice; who justly revolted from their Country's false Religion, and false, or foolish, Devotion to it; but who yet fell short of replacing what they subverted by any such better Hope as others, upon whom no better Faith had dawned, had yet made a Law to themselves. Lucretius, indeed, with such material as Epicurus furnished, consoled himself with the construction of a Machine that needed no Constructor, and acting by a Law that implied no Lawgiver; and so composing himself into a Stoical rather than Epicurean severity of Attitude, sat down to contemplate the mechanical Drama of the Universe of which he was part Actor; himself and all about him (as in his own sublime Description of the Roman Theatre), coloured with the lurid reflex of the Curtain that was suspended between them and the outer Sun. Omar, more desperate, or more careless, of any such laborious System as resulted in nothing more than hopeless Necessity, flung his own Genius and Learning with a bitter jest into the

general Ruin which their insufficient glimpses only served to reveal; and, yielding his Senses to the actual Rose and Vine, only diverted his thoughts by balancing ideal possibilities of Fate, Freewill, Existence and Annihilation; with an oscillation that so generally inclined to the negative and lower side, as to make such Stanzas as the following exceptions to his general Philosophy—

“ Oh, if my Soul can fling his Dust aside,  
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,  
Is't not a Shame, is't not a Shame for Him  
So long in this Clay Suburb to abide!

Or is *that* but a Tent, where rests anon  
A Sultán to his Kingdom passing on,  
And which the swarthy Chamberlain shall  
strike  
Then when the Sultán rises to be gone?”

With regard to the present Translation, the original Rubáiyát (as, missing an Arabic Guttural, these Tetrastichs are more musically called), are independent Stanzas, consisting each of four Lines of equal, though varied, Prosody, sometimes all rhyming, but oftener (as here attempted) the third line suspending the Cadence by which the last atones with the

former Two. Something as in the Greek Alcaic, where the third line seems to lift and suspend the Wave that falls over in the last. As usual with such kind of Oriental Verse, the Rubáiyát follow one another according to Alphabetic Rhyme—a strange Farrago of Grave and Gay. Those here selected are strung into something of an Eclogue, with perhaps a less than equal proportion of the “Drink and make-merry,” which (genuine or not) recurs over-frequently in the Original. For Lucretian as Omar’s Genius might be, he cross’d that darker Mood with much of Olivier de Basselin Humour. Anyway, the Result is sad enough: saddest perhaps when most ostentatiously merry: any way, fitter to move Sorrow than Anger toward the old Tentmaker, who, after vainly endeavouring to unshackle his Steps from Destiny, and to catch some authentic Glimpse of To-morrow, fell back upon To-day (which has out-lastcd so many To-morrows!) as the only Ground he got to stand upon, however, momentarily slipping from under his Feet.

EDWARD FITZGERALD.



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**O**MAR KHAYYAM was born at Naishápúr in Khorassán in the latter half of our Eleventh, and died within the First Quarter of our Twelfth, Century. The slender Story of his Life is curiously twined about that of two other very considerable Figures in their Time and Country: one of whom tells the Story of all Three. This was Nizám ul Mulk, Vizyr to Alp Arslan the Son, and Malik Shah the Grandson, of Toghrul Beg the Tartar, who had wrested Persia from the feeble Successor of Mahmúd the Great, and founded that Seljukian Dynasty which finally roused Europe into the Crusades. This Nizám ul Mulk, in his Wasyat—or Testament—which he wrote and left as a Memorial for future Statesmen—relates the following, as quoted in the *Calcutta Review*, No. 59, from Mirkhond's *History of the Assassins*.

“One of the greatest of the wise men of Khorassán was the Imám Mowaffak of Naishápúr, a man highly honoured and revered—may God rejoice his soul; his illustrious years exceeded eighty-

five, and it was the universal belief that every boy who read the Koran or studied the traditions in his presence, would assuredly attain to honour and happiness. For this cause did my father send me from Tús to Naishápúr with Abd-us-samad, the doctor of law, that I might employ myself in study and learning under the guidance of that illustrious teacher. Towards me he ever turned an eye of favour and kindness, and as his pupil I felt for him extreme affection and devotion, so that I passed four years in his service. When I first came there, I found two other pupils of mine own age newly arrived, Hakim Omar Khayyám, and the ill-fated Ben Sabbáh. Both were endowed with sharpness of wit and the highest natural powers; and we three formed a close friendship together. When the Imám rose from his lectures, they used to join me, and we repeated to each other the lessons we had heard. Now Omar was a native of Naishápúr, while Hasan Ben Sabbáh's father was one Ali, a man of austere life and practice, but heretical in his creed and doctrine. One day Hassan said to me and to Khayyám, "It is a universal belief that the pupils of the Imám Mowaffak will attain to fortune. Now, even if we all do not attain thereto, without doubt one of us will; what then shall be our mutual pledge and bond?" We answered, "Be it what you please." "Well," he said, "let us make a vow, that to

whomsoever this fortune falls, he shall share it equally with the rest, and reserve no pre-eminence for himself." "Be it so," we both replied, and on those terms we mutually pledged our words. Years rolled on, and I went from Khorassán to Transoxiana, and wandered to Ghazni and Cabul; and when I returned I was invested with office, and rose to be administrator of affairs during the Sultanate of Sultan Alp Arslán.'

"He goes on to state, that years passed by, and both his old school-friends found him out, and came and claimed a share in his good fortune, according to the school-day vow. The Vizier was generous and kept his word. Hasan demanded a place in the government, which the Sultan granted at the Vizier's request; but discontented with a gradual rise, he plunged into the maze of intrigue of an oriental court, and, failing in a base attempt to supplant his benefactor, he was disgraced and fell. After many mishaps and wanderings, Hasan became the head of the Persian sect of the Ismailians,—a party of fanatics who had long murmured in obscurity, but rose to an evil eminence under the guidance of his strong and evil will. In A.D 1090, he seized the castle of Alamút in the province of Rúdbar, which lies in the mountainous tract, south of the Caspian Sea; and it was from this mountain home he obtained that evil celebrity among the crusaders as the OLD MAN OF

THE MOUNTAINS and spread terror through the Mohammedan world; and it is yet disputed whether the word *Assassin*, which they have left in the language of modern Europe as their dark memorial, is derived from the *hashish*, or opiate of hemp-leaves (the Indian *bang*), with which they maddened themselves to the sullen pitch of oriental desperation, or from the name of the founder of the dynasty, whom we have seen in his quiet collegiate days, at Naishápúr. One of the countless victims of the Assassin's dagger was Nizám ul Mulk himself, the old school-boy friend.<sup>1</sup>

"Omar Khayyám also came to the Vizier to claim the share; but not to ask for title or office.

The greatest boon you can confer on me,' he said, 'is to let me live in a corner under the shadow of your fortune, to spread wide the advantages of Science, and pray for your long life and prosperity.' The Vizier tells us that, when he found Omar was really sincere in his refusal, he pressed him no further, but granted him a yearly pension of 1200 *mithkál*s of gold, from the treasury of Naishápúr.

'Some of Omar's Rubaiyat warn us of the danger of Greatness, the instability of Fortune, and while advocating Charity to all men, recommending us to be too intimate with none. Attar makes Nizam ul Mulk use the very words of his friend Omar [Rub. xxxi.], "When Nizam ul Mulk was in the Agony (of Death) he said, 'Oh God! I am passing away in the hand of the Wind.'"

“ At Naishápúr thus lived and died Omar Khayyám, busied,’ adds the Vizier, ‘ in winning knowledge of every kind, and especially in Astronomy, wherein he attained to a very high pre-eminence. Under the Sultanate of Malik Shah, he came to Merv, and obtained great praise for his proficiency in science, and the Sultan showered favours upon him.’

“ When Malik Shah determined to reform the calendar, Omar was one of the eight learned men employed to do it; the result was the *Faláli* era (so called from *Falál-ud-din*, one of the king’s names)—‘ a computation of time,’ says Gibbon, ‘ which surpasses the Julian, and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style.’ He is also the author of some astronomical tables, entitled *Ziji-Malik-sháhi*,” and the French have lately republished and translated an Arabic Treatise of his on Algebra.

“ His *Takhallus* or poetical name (*Khayyám*) signifies a Tent-maker, and he is said to have at one time exercised that trade, perhaps before *Nizám ul Mulk*’s generosity raised him to independence. Many Persian poets similarly derive their names from their occupations; thus we have *Attár*, ‘ a druggist,’ *Assár*, ‘ an oil presser, etc.’ Omar himself alludes to his name in the following whimsical lines :—

Though all these, like our Smiths, Archers, Millers, Fletchers, etc., may simply retain the Surname of an hereditary calling.

“ ‘ Khayyám, who stitched the tents of science,  
Has fallen in grief's furnace and been suddenly  
burned;

The shears of Fate have cut the tent ropes of his  
life.

And the broker of Hope has sold him for nothing!’

“ We have only one more anecdote to give of his Life, and that relates to the close; it is told in the anonymous preface which is sometimes prefixed to his poems; it has been printed in the Persian in the appendix to Hyde's *Veterum Persarum Religio*, p. 499; and D'Herbelot alludes to it in his *Bibliothèque*, under *Khiam*:

“ ‘ It is written in the chronicles of the ancients that this king of the Wise, Omar Khayyám, died at Naishápúr in the year of the Hegira 517 (A.D. 1123); in science he was unrivalled—the very paragon of his age. Khwájah Nizámi of Samarcand, who was one of his pupils, relates the following story: “ I often used to hold conversations with my teacher, Omar Khayyám, in a garden; and one day he said to me, ‘ My tomb shall be in a spot, where the north wind may scatter roses over it.’ I wondered at the words

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he spake, but I knew that his were no idle words.<sup>1</sup> Years after, when I chanced to revisit Naishápúr, I went to his final resting-place and lo! it was just outside a garden, and trees laden with fruit stretched their boughs over the garden wall, and dropped their flowers upon his tomb, so as the stone was hidden under them.” ” ”

Thus far—without fear of Trespass—from the *Calcutta Review*. The writer of it, on reading in India this story of Omar's Grave, was reminded, he says, of Ciceor's Account of finding Archimedes' Tomb at Syracuse, buried in grass and weeds. I think Thorwaldsen desired to have roses grow over him; a wish religiously fulfilled for him to the present day, I believe. However, to return to Omar.

<sup>1</sup> The Rashness of the Words, according to D'Harbelot, consisted in being so opposed to those in the Koran: "No man knows where he shall die."—This Story of Omar recalls a very different one so naturally—and, when one remembers how wide of his humble mark the noble sailor aimed—so pathetically told by Captain Cook—not by Doctor Hawkesworth—in his Second Voyage. When leaving Ulitea, "Oreo's last request was for me to return. When he saw he could not obtain that Promise, he asked the name of my *Marai*—Burying place. As strange a question as this was, I hesitated not a moment to tell him Steepney, 'the parish in which I live when in London. I was made to repeat it several times over till they could pronounce it; and then 'Steepney Marai no Tootee' was echoed through a hundred mouths at once. I afterwards found the same question had been put to Mr. Forster by a man on shore; but he gave a different, and indeed more proper answer, by saying. "No man who used the sea could say where he should be buried."



Though the Sultan “shower’d Favours upon him,” Omar’s Epicurean Audacity of Thought and Speech caused him to be regarded askance in his own Time and Country. He is said to have been especially hated and dreaded by the Súfis, whose Practice he ridiculed, and whose Faith amounts to little more than his own when stript of the Mysticism and formal recognition of Islamism under which Omar would not hide. Their Poets, including Háfiz, who are (with the exception of Firdausi) the most considerable in Persia, borrowed largely, indeed, of Omar’s material, but turning it to a mystical Use more convenient to Themselves and the People they addressed; a People quite as quick of Doubt as of Belief; as keen of Bodily Sense as of Intellectual; and delighting in a cloudy compound of both, in which they could float luxuriously between Heaven and Earth, and this World and the Next, on the wings of a poetical expression, that might serve indifferently for either. Omar was too honest of Heart as well as of Head for this. Having failed (however mistakenly) of finding any Providence but Destiny, and any World but This, he set about making the most of it; preferring rather to soothe the Soul through the Senses into Acquiescence with Things as he saw them, than to perplex it with vain disquietude after what they might be. It has been seen, however, that his Worldly Ambition was not

exorbitant and he very likely takes a humorous or perverse pleasure in exalting the gratification of Sense above that of the intellect, in which he must have taken great delight, although it failed to answer the Questions in which he, in common with all men, was most vitally interested.

For whatever Reason, however, Omar, as before said, has never been popular in his own Country, and therefore has been but scantily transmitted abroad. The MSS. of his Poems, mutilated beyond the average Casualties of Oriental Transcription, are so rare in the East as scarce to have reacht Westward at all, in spite of all the acquisitions of Arms and Science. There is no copy at the India House, none at the Bibliothèque Impériale of Paris. We know but of one in England: No. 140 of the Ouseley MSS. at the Bodleian, written at Shiraz, A.D. 1460. This contains but 158 Rubáiyát. One in the Asiatic Society's Library at Calcutta (of which we have a copy), contains (and yet incomplete) 516, though swelled to that by all kinds of Repetition and Corruption. So Von Hammer speaks of his Copy as containing about 200, while Dr. Sprenger catalogues the Lucknow MS. at double that Number.<sup>1</sup> The Scribes too, of the

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Oxford and Calcutta MSS. seem to do their Work under a sort of Protest; each beginning with a Tetra-stich (whether genuine or not), taken out of its alphabetic order; the Oxford with one of Apology; the Calcutta with one of Expostulation, supposed (says a notice prefixed to the MS.) to have risen from a Dream, in which Omar's mother asked about his future fate. It may be rendered thus :—

“ Oh Thou who burn'st in Heart for those who  
burn  
In Hell, whose fires thyself shall feed in turn;  
How long be crying, ‘ Mercy on them, God !’  
Why, who art Thou to teach, and He to learn?”

The Bodleian Quatrain pleads Pantheism by way of Justification.

“ If I myself upon a looser Creed  
Have loosely trug the Jewel of Good deed,  
Let this one thing for my Atonement plead;  
That One for Two I never did mis-read.”

The Reviewer, to whom I owe the Particulars of Omar's Life, concludes his Review by comparing him with Lucretius, both as to natural Temper and Genius and as acted upon by the Circumstances in which he

lived. Both indeed were men of subtle, strong, and cultivated Intellect, fine Imagination, and Hearts passionate for Truth and Justice! who justly revolted from their Country's false Religion, and false, or foolish, Devotion to it; but who yet fell short of replacing what they subverted by such better **Hope** as others, with no better Revelation to guide them, had yet made a Law to themselves. Lucretius, indeed, with such material as Epicurus furnished, satisfied himself with the theory of so vast a machine fortuitously constructed, and acting by a Law that implied no Legislator; and so composing himself into a Stoical rather than Epicurean severity of Attitude, sat down to contemplate the mechanical Drama of the Universe which he was part Actor in; himself and all about him (as in his own sublime description of the Roman Theatre) discoloured with the lurid reflex of the Curtain suspended between the Spectator and the Sun. Omar, more desperate, or more careless of any so complicated System as resulted in nothing but hopeless Necessity, flung his own Genius and Learning with a bitter or humorous jest into the general Ruin which their insufficient glimpses only served to reveal; and, pretending sensual pleasure as the serious purpose of Life, only diverted himself with speculative problems of Deity, Destiny, Matter and Spirit, Good and Evil, and other such questions,

easier to start than to run down, and the pursuit of which becomes a very weary sport at last!

With regard to the present Translation, the original Rubáiyát (as, missing an Arabic Guttural, these **Tetrastichs** are more musically called) are independent Stanzas, consisting each of four Lines of equal, though varied, Prosody; sometimes all rhyming, but oftener (as hear imitated) the third line a blank. Something as in the Greek Alcaic, where the penultimate line seems to lift and suspend the Wave that falls over in the last. As usual with such kind of Oriental Verse, the Rubáiyát follow one another according to Alphabetic Rhyme—a strange succession of Grave and Gay. Those here selected are strung into something of an Eclogue, with perhaps a less than equal proportion of the “Drink and make-merry,” which (genuine or not) recurs over-frequently in the Original. Either way, the Result is sad enough; saddest perhaps when most ostentatiously merry; more apt to move Sorrow than Anger toward the old Tent-maker; who, after vainly endeavouring to unshackle his Steps from Destiny, and to catch some authentic Glimpse of To-morrow, fell back upon To-day (which has out-lasting so many To-morrows!) as the only Ground he got to stand upon, however momentarily slipping from under his Feet.

While the present Edition of Omar was preparing, Monsieur Nicolas, French Consul at Rescht, published a very careful and very good Edition of the Text, from a lithograph copy at Teheran, comprising 464 Rubáiyát, with translation and notes of his own.

Mons. Nicolas, whose Edition has reminded me of several things, and instructed me in others, does not consider Omar to be the material Epicurean that I have literally taken him for, but a Mystic, shadowing the Deity under the figure of Wine, Wine-bearer, etc., as Háfiz is supposed to do; in short, a Súfi Poet like Háfiz and the rest.

I cannot see reason to alter my opinion, formed as it was a dozen years ago when Omar was first shown me by one to whom I am indebted for all I know of Oriental, and very much of other, literature. He admired Omar's Genius so much, that he would gladly have adopted any such Interpretation of his meaning as Mons. Nicolas if he could.<sup>1</sup> That he could not appears by his Paper in the *Calcutta Review* already so largely quoted; in which he argues from the Poems themselves, as well as from what records remain of the Poet's Life.

And if more were needed to disprove Mons. Nicolas' Theory, there is the Biographical Notice

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps would have edited the Poem himself some years ago. He may now as little approve of my Version on one side, as of Mons. Nicolas' on the other.

which he himself has drawn up in direct contradiction to the Interpretation of the Poems given in his Notes. Here is one of the Anecdotes he produces. “ Mais ravenons á Khéyam, qui, resté étranger á toutes ces alternatives de guerres, d'intrigues, et de révoltes, dont cette époque fut si remplie, vivait tranquille dans son village natal, se livrant avec passion á l'étude de la philosophie des Soufis. Entouré de nombreux amis il cherchait avec eux dans le vin cette contemplation extatique que d'autres croient trouver dans des cris et des hurlemens,” etc. “ Les chroniqueurs persans racontent que Khéyam aimait surtout á s'entretenir at á boire avec ses amis, le soir au clair de la lune sur la terrasse de sa maison, entouré de chanteurs et musiciens, avec un échanson qui, la coupe á la main, la présentait á tour de rôle aux joyeux convives réunis.—Pendant une de ces soirées dont nous venons de parler, survient á l'improviste un coup de vent qui éteint les chandelles et renverse á terre la cruche de vin, placée imprudemment sur le bord de la terrasse. La cruche fut brisée et le vin repandu. Aussitôt Khéyam irrité, improvisa ce quatrain impie á l'adresse du Tout-Puissant: ‘Tu as brisé ma cruche de vin, mon Dieu! tu as ainsi fermé sur moi la porte de la joie, mon Dieu! c'est moi qui bois, et c'est toi qui commets les désordres de

l'ivresse! oh! (puisse ma bouche se remplir de la terre!) serais-tu ivre, mon Dieu?"

"Le poète, après avoir prononcé ce blasphème, jetant les yeux sur une glace, se serait aperçu que son visage était noir comme du charbon. C'était une punition du ciel. Alors il fit cet autre quatrain non moins audacieux que le premier. 'Quel est l'homme ici-bas qui n'a point commis, de péche, dis? Celui qui n'en aurait point commis, comment aurait-il vécu, dis? Si, parce que je fais du mal, tu me punis par le mal, quelle est donc la différence qui existe entre toi et moi, dis?'"

I really hardly knew poor Omar was so far gone till his Apologist informed me. Here we see then that, whatever were the Wine that Háfiz drank and sang, the veritable Juice of the Grape it was which Omar used not only when carousing with his friends, but (says Mons. Nicolas) in order to excite himself to that pitch of Devotion which others reached by cries and "hurlemens." And yet, whenever Wine, Wine-bearer, etc., occur in the Text—which is often enough—Mons. Nicolas carefully annotates "Dieu" "La Divinite," etc.; so carefully indeed that one is tempted to think he was indoctrinated by the Súfi with whom he read the Poems. (Note to Rub. ii. p. 8.) A Persian would naturally wish to vindicate a distinguished Countryman; and a Súfi to enrol him



in his own sect, which already comprises all the chief Poets of Persia.

What historical Authority has Mons. Nicolas to show that Omar gave himself up “avec passion á l’étude de la philosophie des Soufis”? (Preface, p. ciii.) The Doctrines of Pantheism Materialism, Necessity, etc., were not peculiar to the Súfi; nor to Lucretius before them; nor to Epicurus before him; probably the very original Irreligion of thinking men from the first; and very likely to be the spontaneous growth of a Philosopher living in an Age of social and political barbarism, under sanction of one of the Two and Seventy Religions supposed to divide the world. Von Hammer (according to Sprenger’s Oriental Catalogue) speaks of Omar as “a Free-thinker, and a great opponent of Súfism: “perhaps because, while holding much of their Doctrine, he would not pretend to any inconsistent severity of morals. Sir W. Ousely has written a Note to something of the same effect on the fly-leaf of the Bodleian MS. And in two Rubáiyát of Mons. Nicolas’ own Edition Súf and Súfi are both disparagingly named.

No doubt many of these Quatrains seem unaccountable unless mystically interpreted; but many more as unaccountable unless literally. Were the Wine spiritual, for instance, how wash the Body with it when dead? Why make cups of the dead clay to

be filled with—"La Divinité"—by some succeeding Mystic? Mons. Nicolas himself is puzzled by some "bizarres" and "trop Orientales" allusions and images—"d'une sensualité quelquefois révoltante" indeed—which "les convenances" do not permit him to translate; but still which the reader cannot but refer to "La Divinité."<sup>1</sup> No doubt also many of the Quatrains in the Teheran, as in the Calcutta, Copies, are spurious; such *Rubáiyát* being the common form of Epigram in Persia. But this, at best, tells as much one way as another; nay, the Súfi, who may be considered the Scholar and Man of Letters in Persia, would be far more likely than the careless Epicure to interpolate what favours his own view of the Poet. I observe that very few of the more mystical Quatrains are in the Bodleian MS., which must be one of the oldest, as dated at Shiraz, A.H 865, A.D 1460. And this, I think, especially distinguishes Omar (I cannot help calling him by his—no, not Christian—familiar

<sup>1</sup> A Note to Quatrain 234 admits that, however clear the mystical meaning of such Images must be to Europeans, they are not quoted without "rougissant" even by laymen in Persia—"Quant aux termes de tendresse qui commencent ce quatrain, comme tant d'autres dans ce recueil, nos lecteurs, habitués maintenant à l'étrangeté des expressions si souvent employées par Kheyam pour rendre ses pensées sur l'amour divin, et à la singularité des images trop orientales, d'une sensualité quelquefois révoltante, n'auront pas de peine à se persuader qu'il s'agit de la Divinité bien que cette conviction soit vivement discutée par les monllahs Musulman's et même par beaucoup de laïques, qui rougissent véritablement d'une pareille licence de leur compatriote à l'égard des choses spirituelles."

name) from all other Persian Poets: That, whereas with them the Poet is lost in his Song, the Man in Allegory and Abstraction; we seem to have the Man—the **Bonhomme**—Omar himself, with all his Humours and Passions, as frankly before us as if we were really at Table with him, after the Wine had gone round.

I must say that I, for one, never wholly believed in the Mysticism of Háfiz. It does not appear there was any danger in holding and singing Súfi Pantheism, so long as the Poet made his Salaam to Mohammed at the beginning and end of his Song. Under such conditions Jeláluddin, Jámi, Attár, and others sang; using Wine and Beauty indeed as Images to illustrate, not as a Mask to hide, the Divinity they were celebrating. Perhaps some Allegory less liable to mistake or abuse had been better among so inflammable a People: much more so when, as some think with Háfiz and Omar, the abstract is not only likened to, but identified with, the sensual Image; hazardous, if not to the Devotee himself, yet to his weaker Brethren; and worse for the Profane in proportion as the Devotion of the Initiated grew warmer. And all for what? To be tantalised with Images of sensual enjoyment which must be renounced if one would approximate a God, who, according to the Doctrine, is Sensual Matter as well

as Spirit, and into whose Universe one expects unconsciously to merge after Death, without hope of any posthumous Beatitude in another world to compensate for all the self-denial of this. Lucretius' blind Divinity certainly merited, and probably got, as much self-sacrifice as this of the Sufi; and the burden of Omar's Song—if not "Let us eat"—is assuredly—"Let us drink, for To-morrow we die!" And if Háfiz meant quite otherwise by a similar language, he surely miscalculated when he devoted his Life and Genius to so equivocal a Psalmody as, from his Day to this, has been said and sung by any rather than spiritual Worshippers.

However, it may remain an Open Question, both with regard to Háfiz and Omar; the reader may understand them either way, literally or mystically, as he chooses. Whenever Wine, Wine-bearer, Cypress, etc., are named, he has only to suppose "La Divinité;" and when he has done so with Omar, I really think he may proceed to the same Interpretation of Anacreon—and even Anacreon Moore.

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**Rubaiyat**  
of  
**Omar Khayyam**

*FIRST EDITION—1859.*



# RUBAIYAT

of

Omar Khayyám of Náishapúr

## I

**A**WAKE ! for Morning in the Bowl of  
Night  
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to  
Flight :  
And Lo ! the Hunter of the East has caught  
The Sultán's Turret in a Noose of Light.

## 2

**D**REAMING when Dawn's Left Hand was in  
the Sky  
I heard a Voice within the Tavern cry,  
“ Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup  
Before Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry.”



AND, as the Cock crew, those who stood  
 before  
 The Tavern shouted—"Open then the Door !  
 You know how little while we have to stay,  
 And, once departed, may return no more."

NOW the New Year reviving old Desires,  
 The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,  
 Where the WHITE HAND OF MOSES on the Bough  
 Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

I RAM indeed is gone with all its Rose  
 And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no  
 one knows ;  
 But still the Vine her ancient Ruby yields,  
 And still a Garden by the Water blows.



*Oh my beloved fill the Cup that clears  
To Day of Past Regret and future Tears  
To morrow! Why To morrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand years*



**A**ND David's Lips are lock't ; but in  
 divine  
 High piping Pehleví, with " Wine ! Wine !  
 Wine !  
 Red Wine !" —the Nightingale cries to the  
 Rose  
 That yellow cheek of hers to incarnadine.

**C**OME, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of  
 Spring  
 The Winter Garment of Repentance fling :  
 The Bird of time has but a little way  
 To fly—and Lo ! the Bird is on the Wing.

**A**ND look—a thousand Blossoms with the  
 Day  
 Woke—and a thousand scatter'd into Clay :  
 And this first Summer Month that brings the  
 Rose  
 Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobád away.

**B**UT come with old Khayyám, and leave the  
 Lot  
 Of Kaikobád and Kaikhosrú forgot :  
 Let Rustum lay about him as he will,  
 Or Hátim Tai cry Supper—heed them **not**.

**W**ITH me along some Strip of Herbage  
 strown  
 That just divides the desert from the sown,  
 Where name of Slave and Sultán scarce is known,  
 And pity Sultán Máhmúd on his Throne.

**H**ERE with a Loaf of Bread beneath the  
 Bough,  
 A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou  
 Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
 And Wilderness is Paradise **now**.

“**H**OW sweet is mortal Sovranty !”—think  
some :

Others—“ How blest the Paradise to come !”  
Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest ;  
Oh, the brave Music of a distant Drum !

**L**OOK to the Rose that blows about us—  
“ Lo,  
Laughing,” she says, “ into the World I blow :  
At once the silken Tassel of my Purse  
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw.”

**T**HE Worldly Hope men set their Hearts  
upon  
Turns Ashes—or it prospers ; and anon,  
Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face  
Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone.

AND those who husbanded the Golden  
 Grain,  
 And those who flung it to the Winds like Rain,  
 Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd  
 As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

THINK, in this batter'd Caravanserai  
 Whose Doorways are alternate Night and  
 Day,  
 How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp  
 Abode his Hour or two, and went his way.

THEY say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
 The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and  
 drank deep ;  
 And Bahrá'm, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass  
 Stamps o'er his Head, and he lies fast asleep.

I SOMETIMES think that never blows so  
                   red  
 The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled ;  
 That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
 Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head.

AND this delightful Herb whose tender  
                   Green  
 Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean—  
 Ah, lean upon it lightly ! for who knows  
 From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen !

OH, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears  
   To-day of past Regrets and future  
                   Fears—  
 To-morrow ?—Why, To-morrow I may be  
 Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.



LO ! Some we loved, the loveliest and  
 best  
 That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,  
 Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,  
 And one by one crept silently to Rest.

AND we, that now make merry in the  
 Room  
 They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom.  
 Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth  
 Descend, ourselves to make a Couch—for whom?

AH, make the most of what we yet may  
 spend.  
 Before we too into the Dust descend ;  
 Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,  
 Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans  
 End !

ALIKE for those who for To-day prepare,  
 And those that after a To-morrow stare,  
 A Muezzín from the Tower of Darkness cries  
 "Fools ! your Reward is neither Here nor  
 There !"

WHY, all the Saints and Sages who  
 discuss'd  
 Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust  
 Like foolish Prophets forth ; their Words to Scorn  
 Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

OH, come with old Khayyám, and leave the  
 Wise  
 To talk ; one thing is certain, that Life flies ;  
 One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies ;  
 The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

MYSELF when young did eagerly frequent  
 Doctor and Saint, and heard great  
 Argument  
 About it and about : but evermore  
 Came out by the same Door as in I went.

WITH them the Seed of Wisdom did I  
 sow,  
 And with my own hand labour'd it to grow :  
 And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—  
 “ I came like Water, and like Wind I go.”

INTO this Universe, and why not know-  
 ing,  
 Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing  
 And out of it, as Wind along the Waste  
 I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.

WHAT, without asking, hither hurried  
whence ?

And, without asking, whither hurried hence !  
Another and another Cup to drown  
The Memory of this Impertinence !

UP from Earth's Centre through the Seventh  
Gate

I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,  
And many Knots unravel'd by the Road ;  
But not the Knot of Human Death and Fate.

THERE was a Door to which I found no  
Key ;

There was a Veil past which I could not see :  
Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE  
There seem'd—and then no more of THEE and ME.

**T**HEN to the rolling Heav'n itself I cried,  
 Asking, "What Lamp had Destiny to guide  
 Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?"  
 And—"A blind Understanding!" Heav'n replied.

**T**HEN to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn  
 My Lip the secret Well of Life to learn :  
 And Lip to Lip it murmur'd—"While you live  
 Drink !—for once dead you never shall return."

**I** THINK the Vessel, that with fugitive  
 Articulation answer'd once did live,  
 And merry-make ; and the cold Lip I kiss'd  
 How many Kisses might it take—and give !

FOR in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,  
 I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay:  
 And with its all obliterated Tongue  
 It murmur'd—"Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"

AH, fill the Cup :—what boots it to repeat  
 How Time is slipping underneath our Feet :  
 Unborn TO-MORROW, and dead YESTERDAY.  
 Why fret about them if TO-DAY be sweet !

ONE Moment in Annihilation's Waste,  
 One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste—  
 The Stars are setting and the Caravan  
 Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—Oh, make haste !

HOW long, how long, in infinite Pursuit  
 Of This and That endeavour and dispute?  
 Better be merry with the fruitful Grape  
 Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit.

YOU know, my Friends, how long since in my  
 House  
 For a new Marriage I did make Carouse :  
 Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,  
 And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

FOR “ Is ” and “ Is-NOT ” though with Rule and  
 Line,  
 And “ UP-AND-DOWN ” without, I could define,  
 I yet in all I only cared to know,  
 Was never deep in anything but—Wine.

**A**ND lately, by the Tavern Door agape,  
 Came stealing through the Dusk an Angel  
 Shape  
 Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder ; and  
 He bid me taste of it ; and ‘ twas—the Grape !

**T**HE Grape that can with Logic absolute  
 The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects  
 confute :  
 The subtle Alchemist that in a Trice  
 Life’s leaden Metal into Gold transmute.

**T**HE mighty Mahmúd, the victorious Lord,  
 That all the misbelieving and black Horde  
 Of Fears and Sorrows that infest the Soul  
 Scatters and slays with his enchanted Sword.



UT leave the Wise to wrangle, and with  
 me  
 The Quarrel of the Universe let be :  
 And, in some corner of the Hubbub coucht,  
 Make Game of that which makes as much of Thee.

FOR in and out, above, about, below,  
 'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show,  
 Play'd in a Box whose Candle is the Sun,  
 Round which we Phantom Figures come and go.

AND if the Wine you drink, the Lip you  
 press,  
 End in the Nothing all Things end in—Yes—  
 Then fancy while Thou art, Thou art but what  
 Thou shalt be—Nothing—Thou shalt not be less.

WHILE the Rose blows along the River  
 Brink,  
 With old Khayyám the Ruby Vintage drink :  
 And when the Angel with his darker Draught  
 Draws up to Thee—take that, and do not shrink.

'TIS all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days  
 Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays  
 Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays.  
 And one by one back in the Closet lays.

THE Ball no Question makes of Ayes and  
 Noes,  
 But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes ;  
 And He that toss'd Thee down into the Field,  
 He knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows !

✓ **T**HE Moving Finger writes ; and, having  
 writ,  
 Moves on ; nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
 Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

**A**ND that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,  
 Whereunder crawling coopt we live and die,  
 Lift not thy hands to It for help—for It  
 Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.

**W**ITH Earth's first Clay They did the Last  
 Man's knead,  
 And then of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed :  
 Yea, the first Morning of Creation wrote  
 What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

I TELL Thee this—When, starting from the  
 Goal,  
 Over the shoulders of the flaming Foal  
 Of Heav'n Parwín and Mushtara they flung,  
 In my predestin'd Plot of Dust and Soul.

THE Vine had struck a Fibre ; which about  
 If clings my Being—let the Súfi flout ;  
 Of my Base Metal may be filed a Key,  
 That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

AND this I know ; whether the one True  
 Light,  
 Kindle to Love, or Wrath—consume me quite,  
 One glimpse of It within the Tavern caught  
 Better than in the Temple lost outright.

OH Thou, who didst with Pitfall and with  
 Gin  
 Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
 Thou wilt not with Predestination round  
 Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin ?

OH, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst  
 make,  
 And who with Eden didst devise the Snake ;  
 For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
 Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give—and take !

### Káza-Náma

LISTEN again. One evening at the close  
 Of Ramazán, ere the better Moon arose,  
 In that old Potter's Shop I stood alone  
 With the clay Population round in Rows.

AND, strange to tell, among the Earthen Lot  
 Some could articulate, while others not :  
 And suddenly one more impatient cried—  
 “ Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot ? ”

THEN said another—“ Surely not in vain  
 My Substance from the common Earth was  
 ta'en,  
 That He who subtly wrought me into Shape  
 Should stamp me back to common Earth again.”

ANOTHER said—“ Why, ne'er a peevish Boy  
 Would break the Bowl from which he drank  
 in Joy ;  
 Shall He that made the Vessel in pure Love  
 And Fancy, in an after Rage destroy ! ”

NONE answer'd this ; but after Silence spake  
     A Vessel of a more ungainly Make :  
 “ They sneer at me for leaning all awry ;  
 What ! did the Hand then of the Potter shake ? ”

SAID one—“ Folks of a surly Tapster tell,  
     And daub his Visage with the Smoke of Hell ;  
 They talk of some strict Testing of us—Pish !  
 He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well.”

THEN said another with a long-drawn Sigh,  
     “ My Clay with long oblivion is gone dry  
 But, fill me with the old familiar Juice, .  
 Methinks I might recover by-and-bye ! ”

SO while the vessels one by one were speak-  
 ing,  
 One spied the little Crescent all were seeking :  
 And then they jogg'd each other, " Brother !  
 Brother !  
 Hark to the Porter's Shoulder-knot a-creaking !"

AH, with the Grape my fading Life provide,  
 And wash my Body whence the Life has died,  
 And in a Windingsheet of Vine-leaf wrapt,  
 So bury me by some sweet Garden-side.

THAT ev'n my buried Ashes such a Snare  
 Of Perfume shall fling up into the Air,  
 As not a True Believer passing by  
 But shall be overtaken unaware.



**I**NDEED the Idols I have loved so long  
 Have done my Credit in Men's Eye much  
 wrong :  
 Have drown'd my Honour in a shallow Cup,  
 And sold my Reputation for a Song.

**I**NDEED, indeed, Repentance oft before  
 I swore—but was I sober when I swore ?  
 And then and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand  
 My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore.

**A**ND much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,  
 And robb'd me of my Robe of Honour—  
 well,  
 I often wonder what the Vintners buy  
 One half so precious as the Goods they sell.

**A**LAS, that Spring should vanish with the  
 Rose !  
 That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should  
 close !  
 The Nightingale that in the Branches sang,  
 Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows !

**A**H Love ! could thou and I with Fate  
 conspire  
 To graps this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
 Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
 Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire !

**A**H, Moon of my Delight who know'st no  
 wane,  
 The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again :  
 How oft hereafter rising shall she look  
 Through this same Garden after me—in vain !

**A**ND when Thyself with shining Foot shall  
pass  
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,  
And in thy joyous Errand reach the Spot  
Where I made one—turn down an empty Glass !

**Tamám Shad**

**Rubaiyat**  
of  
**Omar Khayyam**

*SECOND EDITION -1868.*



# RUBAIYAT

of

Omar Khayyám of Náishapūr

## I

**W**AKE ! For the Sun behind you Eastern  
height  
Has chased the Session of the Stars from Night ;  
And, to the field of Heav'n ascending, strikes  
The Sultán's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

## 2

**B**EFORE the phantom of False morning  
died,  
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,  
“ When all the Temple is prepared within,  
Why lags the drowsy Worshipper outside ? ”

AND, as the Cock crew, those who stood  
before

The Tavern shouted—"Open then the door !  
You know how little while we have to stay,  
And, once departed, may return no more."

NOW the New Year reviving old Desires,  
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,  
Where the WHITE HAND OF MOSES on the Bough  
Puts out, and Jesus from the ground suspires.

IRAM indeed is gone with all his Rose,  
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no  
one knows ;  
But still a Ruby gushes from the Vine,  
And many a Garden by the Water blows.

AND David's lips are lockt ; but in divine  
 High-piping Péhlevi, with " Wine ! Wine !  
 Wine !  
 Red Wine !" — the Nightingale cries to the Rose  
 That sallow cheek of hers to incarnadine.

COME, fill the Cup, and in the fire of  
 Spring  
 Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling :  
 The Bird of Time has but a little way  
 To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.

WHETHER at Naishápúr or Babylon,  
 Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,  
 The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,  
 The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.



**M**ORNING, a thousand Roses brings, you  
say ;

Yes, but where leaves the Rose of yesterday ?  
And this first Summer month that brings the Rose  
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobád away.

**W**ELL, let it take them ! What have we  
to do

With Kaikobád the Great, or Kaikhosrú ?  
Let Rustum cry “ To Battle ! ” as he likes,  
Or Hátim Tai “ To Supper ! ”—heed not you.

**W**ITH me along the strip of Herbage strown  
That just divides the desert from the sown,  
Where name of Slave and Sultán is forgot—  
And Peace to Máhmúd on his golden Throne !



*Who e'er returned of all that went before,  
To tell of that long road they travel o'er?  
Leave naught undone of what you have to do,  
For when you go, You will return no more*



**H**ERE with a little Bread beneath the Bough,  
     A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and  
     Thou  
 Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
 Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow !

**S**OME for the Glories of This World ; and  
     some  
 Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come ;  
 Ah, take the Cash, and let the Promise go.  
 Nor heed the music of a distant Drum !

**W**ERE it not Folly, Spider-like to spin  
     The Thread of present Life away to win—  
 What ? for ourselves, who know not if we shall  
 Breathe out the very Breath we now breathe in !

**L**OOK to the blowing Rose about us—"Lo,  
Laughing," she says, "into the world I  
blow :

At once the silken tassel of my Purse  
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."

**F**OR those who husbanded the Golden  
grain,  
And those who flung it to the winds like Rain,  
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd  
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

**T**HE Worldly Hope men set their Hearts  
upon  
Turns Ashes—or it prospers ; and anon,  
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,  
Lightning a little hour or two—was gone.

THINK, in this batter'd Caravanserai  
     Whose Portals are alternate Night and  
     Day,  
 How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp  
 Abode his destin'd Hour, and went his way.

THEY say the Lion-and the Lizard keep  
     The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and  
     drank deep :  
 And Bahrá'm, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass  
 Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

THE Palace that to Heav'n his pillars threw,  
     And Kings the forehead on his threshold  
     drew—  
 I saw the solitary Ringdove there,  
 And “Coo, coo, coo,” she cried ; and “Coo,  
     coo, coo.”

AH, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears  
 To-day of past Regret and future Fears :  
 To-morrow !—Why, To-morrow I may be  
 Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years.

FOR some we loved, the loveliest and the  
 best  
 That from his Vintage rolling Time has prest,  
 Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,  
 And one by one crept silently to rest.

AND we, that now make merry in the Room  
 They left, and Summer dresses in new  
 bloom,  
 Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth  
 Descend, ourselves to make a Couch—for whom ?

**I**SOMETIMES think that never blows so  
red

The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled ;  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Drop in her lap from some once lovely Head.

**A**ND this delightful Herb whose living Green  
Fledges the River's Lip on which we  
lean—

Ah, lean upon it lightly ! for who knows  
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen !

**A**H, make the most of what we yet may  
spend,

Before we too into the Dust descend ;  
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,  
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans  
End !



**A** LIKE for those who for To-DAY prepare,  
 And those that after some To-MORROW  
 stare,  
 A Muezzín from the Tower of Darkness cries,  
 “Fools ! your Reward is neither Here nor  
 There !”

**A** NOTHER Voice, when I am sleeping cries,  
 “The Flower should open with the Morning  
 skies.”  
 And a retreating Whisper, as I wake—  
 “The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.”

**W** HY, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
 Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust  
 Like foolish Prophets forth ; their Words to Scorn  
 Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with  
 Dust.

MYSELF when young did eagerly frequent  
 Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
 About it and about : but evermore  
 Came out by the same door as in I went.

WITH them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,  
 And with my own hand wrought to make  
 it grow :  
 And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—  
 “ I came like Water, and like Wind I go.”

INTO this Universe, and Why not knowing,  
 Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing :  
 And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,  
 I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing.

**WHAT**, without asking, hither hurried  
     **Whence** ?

And, without asking, **Whither** hurried hence !  
 Ah, contrite Heav'n endowed us with the Vine  
 To drug the memory of that insolence !

**UP** from Earth's Centre through the Seventh  
     Gate

I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,  
 And many Knots unravel'd by the Road ;  
 But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

**THERE** was the Door to which I found no  
     Key :

There was the Veil through which I could not see :  
 Some little talk awhile of **ME** and **THEE**  
 There was—and then no more of **THEE** and **ME**.

EARTH could not answer : nor the Seas that  
 mourn  
 In flowing Purple, of their Lord forlorn ;  
 Nor Heaven, with those eternal Signs reveal'd  
 And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn.

THEN of the THEE IN ME who works behind  
 The Veil of Universe I cried to find  
 A Lamp to guide me through the darkness ; and  
 Something then said—"an Understanding  
 blind."

THEN to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn  
 I lean'd, the secret Well of Life to learn ;  
 And Lip to Lip it murmur'd—"While you live,  
 Drink !—for, once dead, you never shall  
 return."

**I**THINK the Vessel, that with fugitive  
 Articulation answer'd, once did live,  
 And drink ; and that impassive Lip I kiss'd,  
 How many Kisses might it take—and give !

**F**OR I remember stopping by the way  
 To watch a Potter thumping his wet  
 Clay :  
 And with its all-obliterated Tongue  
 It murmur'd—" Gently, Brother, gently, pray !"

**F**OR has not such a Story from of Old  
 Down Man's successive generations roll'd  
 Of such a clod of saturated Earth  
 Cast by the Maker into Human mould ?

AND not a drop that from our Cups we  
     throw  
 On the parcht herbage but may steal below  
 To quench the fire of Anguish in some Eye  
 There hidden—far beneath, and long ago.

AS then the Tulip for her wonted sup  
     Of Heavenly Vintage lifts her chalice up,  
 Do you, twin offspring of the soil, till Heav'n  
 To Earth invert you like an empty Cup.

DO you, within your little hour of Grace,  
     The waving Cypress in your Arms enlace,  
 Before the Mother back into her arms  
 Fold, and dissolve you in a last embrace.

AND if the Cup you drink, the Lip you  
 press,  
 End in what All begins and ends in—Yes ;  
 Imagine then you are what heretofore  
 You were—hereafter you shall not be less.

SO when at last the Angel of the drink  
 Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink,  
 And, proffering his Cup, invites your Soul  
 Forth to your Lips to quaff it—do not shrink.

AND fear not lest Existence closing your  
 Account, should lose, or know the type no  
 more ;  
 The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd  
 Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

**W**HEN You and I behind the Veil are past,  
 Oh but the long long while the World shall  
 last,  
 Which of our Coming and Departure heeds  
 As much as Ocean of a pebble-cast.

**O**NE Moment in Annihilation's Waste,  
 One Moment, of the Well of Life to  
 taste—  
 The Stars are setting, and the Caravan  
 Draws to the Dawn of Nothing—Oh make  
 haste !

**W**OULD you that spangle of Existence  
 spend  
 About THE SECRET—quick about it, Friend !  
 A Hair, they say, divides the False and True—  
 And upon what, prithee, does Life depend ?



A HAIR, they say, divides the False and  
 True ;  
 Yes ; and a single Alif were the clue,  
 Could you but find it, to the Treasure-house,  
 And peradventure to THE MASTER too ;

WHOSE secret Presence, through Creation's  
 veins  
 Running, Quicksilver—like eludes your pains :  
 Taking all shapes from Máh to Máhi ; and  
 They change and perish all—but He remains ;

A MOMENT guess'd —then back behind  
 the Fold  
 Immerst of Darkness round the Drama roll'd  
 Which, for the Pastime of Eternity,  
 He does Himself contrive, enact, behold.

**B**UT if in vain, down on the stubborn floor  
 Of Earth, and up to Heav'n's unopening  
 Door,  
 You gaze To-day, while You are You—how then  
 To-morrow, You when shall be You no more ?

**O**H, plagued no more with Human or  
 Divine,  
 To-morrow's tangle to itself resign,  
 And lose your fingers in the tresses of  
 The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

**W**ASTE not your Hour, not in the vain  
 pursuit  
 Of This and That endeavour and dispute ;  
 Better be merry with the fruitful Grape  
 Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit.

**Y**OU know, my Friends, how bravely in my  
House

For a new Marriage I did make Carouse :  
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,  
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

**F**OR " Is " and " IS-NOT " though with Rule and  
Line

And " UP-AND-DOWN " by Logic I define,  
Of all that one should care to fathom I,  
Was never deep in anything but—Wine.

**A**H, but my Computations, People say,  
Have squared the Year to human compass, eh ?

If so, by striking from the Calendar  
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday.

AND lately, by the Tavern Door agape,  
 Came shining through the Dusk an Angel  
 Shape  
 Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder ; and  
 He bid me taste of it ; and 'twas—the Grape !

THE Grape that can with Logic absolute  
 The two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute  
 The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice  
 Life's leaden metal into Gold transmute :

THE mighty Mahmūd, Allah-breathing Lord,  
 That all the misbelieving and black Horde  
 Of Fears and Sorrows that infest the Soul  
 Scatters before him with his whirlwind Sword.

WHY, be this Juice the growth of God, who  
 dare  
 Blaspheme the twisted tendril as a Snare ?  
 A Blessing, we should use it, should we not ?  
 And if a Curse—why, then, Who set it there ?

I MUST adjure the Balm of Life, I must,  
 Scared by some After-reckoning ta'en on  
 trust,  
 Or lured with Hope of some Diviner Drink,  
 When the frail Cup in crumbled into Dust !

IF but the Vine and Love-adjuring Band  
 Are in the Prophet's Paradise to stand,  
 Alack, I doubt the Prophet's Paradise  
 Were empty as the hollow of one's Hand.

OH threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise !  
 One thing at least is certain—This Life  
 flies :  
 One thing is certain and the rest is Lies ;  
 The Flower that once is blown for ever dies.

STRANGE, is it not ? that of the myriads  
 who  
 Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through  
 Not one returns to tell us of the Road,  
 Which to discover we must travel too.

THE Revelations of Devout and Learn'd  
 Who rose before us, and as Prophets  
 burn'd,  
 Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep  
 They told their fellows, and to Sleep return'd.

**W**HY, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,  
     And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,  
 Is't not a shame—is't not a shame for him  
 So long in this Clay suburb to abide !

**B**UT that is but a Tent wherein may rest  
     A Sultan to the realm of Death address ;  
 The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrásh  
 Strikes, and prepares it for another guest.

**I** SENT my Soul through the Invisible,  
     Some letter of that After-life to spell :  
 And after many days my Soul return'd  
 And said, “ Behold, Myself an Heav'n and  
     Hell ;”

**H**EAV'N but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire  
 And Hell the Shadow of a Soul on fire,  
 Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,  
 So late emerg'd from, shall so soon expire.

**W**E are no other than a moving row  
 Of visionary Shapes that come and go  
 Round with this Sun-illumin'd Lantern held  
 In Midnight by the Master of the Show ;

**I**MPOW'RD Pieces of the Game he plays  
 Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and  
 Days ;  
 Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays ;  
 And one by one back in the Closet lays.



THE Ball no question makes of Ayes and  
 Noes,  
 But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes :  
 And He that toss'd you down into the Field,  
 He knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows !

THE Moving Finger writes ; and, having writ.  
 Moves on : nor all your Piety nor Wit  
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
 Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

FOR let Philosopher and Doctor preach  
 Of what they will, and what they will not  
 —each  
 Is but one Link in an eternal Chain  
 That none can slip, nor break, nor over-reach.

**A**ND that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,  
 Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and  
 die,  
 Lift not your hands to **It** for help—for **It**  
 As impotently rolls as you or I.

**W**ITH Earth's first Clay They did the Last  
 Man knead,  
 And there of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed :  
 And the first Morning of Creation wrote  
 What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

**Y**ESTERDAY This Day's Madness did pre-  
 pare :  
 To-morrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair :  
 Drink ! for you know not whence you came,  
 nor why ;  
 Drink ! for you know not why you go, nor where.

I TELL you this—When, started from the  
     Goal,  
 Over the flaming shoulders of the Foal  
 Of Heav'n Parwīn and Mushtari they flung  
 In my predestin'd Plot of Dust and Soul.

THE Vine had struck a fibre : which about  
     If clings my Being—let the Dervish flout  
 Of my Base metal may be filed a Key,  
 That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

AND this I know : whether the one True  
     Light,  
 Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me quite.  
 One Flash of It within the Tavern caught  
 Better than in the Temple lost outright.

WHAT ! out of senseless Nothing to pro-  
       voke  
 A conscious Something to resent the yoke  
 Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain  
 Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke !

WHAT ! from his helpless Creature be re-  
       paid  
 Pure Gold for what he lent us drossallay'd—  
 Sue for a Debt we never did contract,  
 And cannot answer—Oh the sorry trade !

NAY, but, for terror of his wrathful Face,  
       I swear I will not call Injustice Grace ;  
 Not one Good Fellow of the Tavern but  
 Would kick so poor a Coward from the place.

OH Thou, who didst with pitfall and with  
 gin  
 Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
 Thou wilt not with Predestin'd Evil round  
 Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin ?

OH Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst  
 make,  
 And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake :  
 For all the Sin the Face of wretched Man  
 Is black with—Man's Forgiveness give—and take !

\* \* \* \*

AS under cover of departing Day  
 Slunk hunger-stricken Ramazán away,  
 Once more within the Potter's house alone  
 I stood, surrounded by the Shapes of Clay.

AND once again there gather'd a scarce—  
heard

Whisper among them ; as it were, the stirr'd  
Ashes of some all but extinguisht Tongue,  
Which mine ear kindled into living Word.

SAID one among them—" Surely not in vain,  
My substance from the common Earth was  
ta'en,

That He who subtly wrought me into Shape  
Should stamp me back to shapeless Earth again ?

ANOTHER said—" Why, ne'er a peevish Boy  
Would break the Cup from which he drank  
in Joy ;

Shall He that of his own free Fancy made  
The Vessel, in an after-rage destroy !"

NONE answer'd this ; but after silence spake  
     Some Vessel of a more ungainly Make ;  
 “ They sneer at me for leaning all awry :  
 What ! did the Hand then of the Potter shake ? ”

THUS with the Dead as with the Living,  
     What ?  
 And Why ? so ready, but the Wherefor not,  
 One on a sudden peevishly exclaim'd,  
 “ Which is the Potter, pray, and which the Pot ? ”

SAID one—“ Folks of a surely Master tell,  
     And daub his Visage with the Smoke of  
     Hell :  
 They talk of some sharp Trial of us—Pish !  
 He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well.”

WELL," said another, "Whoso will, let  
     try,  
 My Clay with long oblivion is gone dry :  
 But fill me with the old familiar Juice,  
 Methinks I might recover by-and-bye !"

SO while the Vessels one by one were  
     speaking,  
 One spied the little Crescent all were seeking :  
 And then they jogged each other, "Brother !  
     Brother !  
 Now for the Porter's shoulder-knot a-creaking !"

\* \* \* \*

AH, with the Grape my fading Life provide,  
     And wash my Body whence the Life has  
     died,  
 And lay me, shrouded in the living Leaf,  
 By some not unfrequented Garden-side.



WHITHER resorting from the vernal Heat  
 Shall Old Acquaintance Old Acquaintance  
 greet,  
 Under the Branch that leans above the Wall  
 To shed his Blossom over head and feet.

THEN ev'n my buried Ashes such a snare  
 Of Vintage shall fling up into the Air.  
 As not a true-believer passing by  
 But shall be overtaken unaware.

INDEED the Idols I have loved so long  
 Have done my credit in Men's eye much  
 wrong :  
 Have drown'd my Glory in a shallow Cup,  
 And sold my Reputation for a Song.

INDEED, indeed, Repentance oft before  
 I swore—but was I sober when I swore ?  
 And then and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand  
 My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore.

AND much as Wine has play'd the Infidel,  
 And robb'd me of my Robe of Honour  
 —Well,  
 I often wonder what the Vintners buy  
 One half so precious as the ware they sell.

YET Ah, that Spring should vanish with the  
 Rose !  
 That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should  
 close !  
 The Nightingale that in the branches sang,  
 Ah whence, and whither flown again, who  
 knows !

WOULD but the Desert of the Fountain  
                   yield  
 One glimpse—if dimly, yet indeed reveal'd,  
 Toward which the fainting Traveller might spring.  
 As springs the trampled herbage of the field !

OH if the World were but to re-create,  
       That we might catch ere closed the Book  
       of Fate,  
 And make The Writer on a fairer leaf.  
 Inscribe our names, or quite obliterate !

BETTER, oh better, cancel from the Scroll  
       Of Universe one luckless Human Soul,  
 Than drop by drop enlarge the Flood that rolls  
 Hoarser with Anguish as the Ages roll.

**A**H Love ! could you and I with Fate  
     conspire  
 To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
 Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
 Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire !

**B**UT see ! The rising Moon of Heav'n  
     again  
 Looks for us, Sweet-heart, through the quivering  
     Plane :  
 How oft hereafter rising will she look  
 Among those leaves—for one of us in vain !

**A**ND when Yourself with silver Foot shall  
     pass  
 Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,  
 And in your joyous errand reach the spot  
 Where I made One—turn down an empty Glass !

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